

REPORT TITLE: Review of Residential Children’s Homes and Fostering Provision

Meeting:	Children Scrutiny Panel
Date:	4th February 2025
Cabinet Member (if applicable)	Cllr Kendrick, Cabinet Member for Children’s Services
Key Decision Eligible for Call In	No
Purpose of Report	
To provide assurance and information on our Residential Children’s Homes and Fostering Services.	
Recommendations	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The report is provided for information 	
Resource Implications:	
The arrangements for providing accommodation and care for children looked after by the local authority represents a significant proportion of the children's services budget and the resource is of the council. Ensuring that there is a corporate approach to maintaining and delivering sufficient capacity to meet the needs of children who require care outside their families is essential.	
Date signed off by <u>Executive Director</u> & name	Tom Brailsford 22.1.25
Is it also signed off by the Service Director for Finance?	Not applicable
Is it also signed off by the Service Director for Legal Governance and Commissioning (Monitoring Officer)?	Not applicable

Electoral wards affected: All

Ward councillors consulted: Information provided at full council

Public or private: Public

Has GDPR been considered?

1. Executive Summary

This report is provided to give information and assurance in respect of the provision of internally delivered care arrangements for children looked after by the local authority. The report sets out the work delivered through our fostering and children's residential services which strive to continually improve the local authorities 'in house' capacity to provide homes for children in our care. With regards to our children's residential services, the report highlights our ongoing improvement journey to ensure that our homes inspected by our external regulator to provide good and outstanding care are on track.

2. Information required to take a decision

The report is presented to scrutiny for assurance and information and no decision is sought.

Residential

1. Introduction

- 1.0 We are ambitious for our children and young people and want our children in care and care leavers to be happy, healthy, and successful. We are committed to providing children and young people with high quality parenting, care and the right support, to enable them to aspire, achieve and live healthy, independent, and fulfilling lives. Ensuring that our children have the right home and care to meet their needs at the right time is a core priority for our children's services and it is also essential that we have the right mix of care settings including small group living children's homes where needed.
- 1.1 Between 2016 and 2020 the number of children looked after rose 14% in England. Needs were also shifting, with placements required for a greater number of older children and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, as well as those with more complex needs. In Kirklees we have seen a small reduction in the total number of children looked after over the last 10 years. However, we have seen a rise in the number of residential placements needed for older children with more complex needs.
- 1.2 Our Residential Children's homes services are supported by continuous service improvement plans that includes our focus on designing and delivering a modern residential children's estate, that meets the needs of our children and young people who are identified to best benefit from small group living.
- 1.3 Over the past two years our children's residential services have re-opened a previously closed home in the Dewsbury area and opened a new home offering care and support in the valleys area, to extend our capacity and support the choice of geographical location. Whilst we have worked to expand, we have also maintained our focus on our existing provision working together with partners including our facilities management teams, health services and the police to improve our existing residential estate.

2. Staffing

- 2.0 A core principle of our homes arrangements for bringing children together in group living is ensuring that our homes' statement of purpose and functions are delivered through careful matching of the needs of the children living in our homes, to the skills of our team, together with consideration of the relationships between those who will live together in our home. We are working with our Emotional Wellbeing Service to develop and train our workforce on our model of care.
- 2.1 We have also invested in our residential services infrastructure to ensure that we have adequate leadership and business and administrative support resources across our homes and have designed this into the new establishment model to support our growing estate.

3. Ofsted Judgements and Regulatory Visits

- 3.0 As regulated services, children's residential homes are registered with Ofsted and subject to inspections as set out within the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF). All SCCIF inspections follow the 4-point scale (outstanding, good, requires improvement to be good and inadequate) to make judgements on the overall experiences and progress of children. Full information on the inspection framework is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-care-common-inspection-framework-sccif-childrens-homes/social-care-common-inspection-framework-sccif-childrens-homes#timeframe>.
- 3.1 In addition to an annual inspection, children's homes are also subject to a monthly visit from an independent specialist who will set out a report to the home and manager and submit the report to Ofsted sharing their monthly assessment of the homes performance and compliance considered against the regulation for operating a children's home. Ofsted publish all reports on their website though are careful not to identify the location or names of homes so as not to risk the safeguarding of children living in those homes and communities.
- 3.2 Alongside a judgement rating for the home Ofsted may set out **Compliance Notices**, where they assess that a service is not complying with a requirement, **Requirements** to improve to meet regulation and **Recommendations**. Compliance notices are time bound and will be subject to short term re-inspection. With regards to requirements and recommendations these will usually be subject to the evaluation at the homes next inspection.
- 3.3 At the time of writing this report we anticipate two full inspections before the end of March 2025 and two monitoring visits for the two homes where the judgements at the last inspection were that the homes Required Improvements to be Good. Each home maintains a home improvement plan by the home manager which is considered any identified areas for improvement from the last inspection along with the monthly feedback from our independent regulatory visit to the homes re-opening we will receive

a new inspection and judgement. Of our six registered homes the current Ofsted judgements are as set out below.

Ofsted Unique Ref. Number	DATE/Judgement 2021/2022	DATE/Judgement 2022/2023	DATE/Judgement 2023/2024	Date/Judgement 2024/25
SC034441	Outstanding 11th & 12th May 2021	Outstanding 15th & 16th March 2023	Outstanding 20 th March 2024	Inspection Due before end of March
SC033387	Good 18th & 19th Oct.	Inadequate 18th & 19th Oct. 2022 Requires Improvement 22nd & 23rd Feb 2023	Good 17th & 18th May	Good 25 th Sept. 2024
SC033326	Requires Improvement to be Good 13th & 14th Sept 2021	Good 30th & 31st August 2022	Inadequate 24 th October 2023	Requires Improvement to be Good 6 th August 2024
SC356963	Requires Improvement to be Good 9th & 10th August 2021	Requires Improvement to be Good 14th & 15th June	Inadequate 16th & 17th May Requires Improvement to be Good 1 st August 2023	Requires Improvement to be Good 23 rd October 2024
SC033367	Good 27th & 28th September 2021	Inadequate 18th & 19th July 2022	Requires Improvement to be Good 6 th March 2024	Good 10 th June 2024
2788278	N/A	N/N	N/A	First Inspection due before end of March

3.4 Our ambition is to ensure that all our children’s homes are rated to be Good or Outstanding within the next inspection cycle and our work with facilities management and the revision of our staffing structures and staff training are central to achieving that aim.

4. The balance of internally provided and externally commissioned homes.

- 4.0 At the time of writing Kirklees has 617 young people who are looked after by the Local Authority. There are currently 34 young people living in externally commissioned resident children homes arrangements and 16 young people living in our internal children's home estate out of a total capacity of 22. Whilst we have 6 vacancies, we are currently working to identify a positive match for two children in need to our vacancies at the same time as working with our estates management to plan for the full refurbishment of one of our homes. This which will mean that the home will be out of commission for approximately 10 weeks.
- 4.1 Our residential and social work teams are working together to ensure that our home which was purpose built in the 1990's, is vacated and made available for a full refurbishment plan that was set out as part of our strategy to improve the quality of our homes. The first of our homes to receive a full renovation was the sister home in Dewsbury, which since recommission last year is providing a home for three young people whilst seeking to match a fourth. Ensuring that the service is able to maximise capacity at the same time as supporting our children to live in a modern and homely environment requires careful coordination and negotiation with our colleagues in Home and Neighbourhoods who remain committed to support our collective corporate parenting responsibilities.

5. Fostering

- 5.0 Over the last 10 years in Kirklees in-house foster carer numbers have reduced by 25% In April 2014 there were 208 children living with internal foster carers, compared to 157 in April 2024. Nationally the number of foster carers has fallen to a 10 year low falling from 43,405 to 42,615 in the year to March 2024. Over the same 10-year period payments to foster carers have increased from an average of £335 per week to £447 per week. The average Independent Foster Agency fee we paid in April 2024 is £996 per week.
- 5.1 Our priorities are to increase the number of internal foster carers and maximise their capacity to provide homes for our children, and ensure more children live with our internal Foster Carers than with independent fostering agencies.
- 5.2 We know that nationally sufficiency is an issue. There are not enough foster carers in Kirklees to meet the needs of our children and we require further work to grow and improve our internal residential estate to maximise capacity. In relation to the demographic of our children in care, they are predominantly over the age of 12. Our shortage of appropriately motivated and available foster carers and internal homes that are able to meet their needs results in an increased reliance on the costly private sector. Foster carers may choose to foster for Kirklees, or any of our neighbouring authorities, or go with an independent fostering agency (who often have higher fees than the local authority). Due to this there is significant competition to ensure prospective and current

carers foster with Kirklees. We need to ensure we remain competitive, and the place of choice for carers to foster.

- 5.3 We recognise there is more to do to ensure we increase our number of internal foster carers. We have a target to recruit 20 new foster carers in 2024/25 and we are proud that we are on track to meet this target. Despite pressures in the fostering service we have been successful in recruiting new foster carers- the main reason for this is through word of mouth rather than an advertising campaign. We have a recruitment and marketing plan and continue to seek multiple ways to promote fostering so we can attract new carers. We recognise there is more work to do to ensure we have a full council and partnership approach to this recruitment.
- 5.4 Whilst recruitment is strong we need to continue to ensure we retain foster carers. We review all foster carers who leave fostering. The main reason for this is positive. We have kinship carers who have obtained a special guardianship order for the child/ren they are caring for. Therefore, they no longer provide a fostering service for other children.
- 5.5 We have a sufficiency strategy and service plans in place to address our need for more foster carers. To strengthen this, we have recently acquired project manager support to review, refresh and drive this strategy forward with a focus on an invest to save model- aiming to reduce our spend whilst addressing our sufficiency needs for our children looked after and care leavers.
- 5.6 The fostering service reports regularly to a number of forums to track and monitor progress of plans and milestones- this includes to the Senior Leadership Team and to the Kirklees Parenting board. We have undertaken a number of improvements to grow and invest in fostering. The revised sufficiency strategy will set clear milestones for 2025. Some highlights include:
- Whilst a new fostering skills payment policy was approved in June, a further review is required to ensure we are competitive- in particular our need is for same day placements and older children/sibling groups.
 - The service is working on a proposal to develop a fostering offer when emergency homes are required- to avoid the use of unregulated arrangements.
 - We have updated our Supported Lodgings Policy and now require a recruitment campaign in this area- this is an alternative to fostering that offers homes to young people age 16+.
 - We are proud that we currently have 3 fostering mockingbird hubs. This is a model based around a hub home carer who builds strong relationships with other foster carers in the constellation, empowering families to support each other and overcome problems before they escalate or lead to placement breakdown. We aim to increase our mockingbird hubs- with a plan for a 4th hub by April 2025- there is a plan in place to skill up a current foster carer household to take on this role.

- Work is being undertaken to strengthen our approach to recruiting new foster carers with the support from our partnerships and the whole council.

3. Implications for the Council

The provision of homes for children in the care of the local authority is understood to be one of the most important things the council delivers. Ensuring that our homes and foster carers are effectively supported and supervised, and that there are enough carers and homes available to meet the needs of our children is a key priority for our children's services.

3.1 Council Plan

Our arrangements for providing carers and children's residential homes draws on the core values set out within the Kirklees Council plan consistent with our council vision Unshared outcomes to ensure that our children are well, have the best start and are able to grow to be successful and independent.

3.2 Financial Implications

The local authority has a responsibility to provide homes for children in its care and achieves this through a mixed economy of commissioned and internally provided accommodation. The national context with regards to providing for children looked after by local authorities is recognised as challenging as the demand for children's residential and fostering arrangements is outstripped by demand. For Kirklees we continue to prioritise working with families at the earliest opportunity so that we can support them to stay together with help and support from our children's services. This means that we continue to have a lower than average number of children requiring alternative care arranged by the local authority. Whilst we continue to maintain a lower rate of children coming into care for those that do require accommodation this represents a significant proportion of children's services spending. We are therefore committed to ensuring that whilst providing high quality and stable homes for our children we consider best value and maintain our own provision.

3.3 Legal Implications

Failure to provide suitable and adequate homes for our children can result in legal challenge as well as reputational damage to the authority.

3.4 Climate Change and Air Quality

Not Applicable

3.5 Other (eg Risk, Integrated Impact Assessment or Human Resources)

Not Applicable

4. Consultation

Not Applicable

5. Engagement

Not applicable

- 6. Options**
Not applicable
- 7. Next steps and timelines**
To continue to recruit foster carers and maximise the use of our internal provision.
- 8. Contact officer**
Joel Hanna Head of Service children looked After and Residential services
Anna Gledhill Head of Service Fostering services.
- 9. Background Papers and History of Decisions**
- 10. Appendices**
Not applicable
- 11. Service Director responsible**
Vicky Metherringham Service Director (Children and Families)